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ABSTRACT

This book is intended for anyone who seeks to help people to embrace and grow in the Catholic faith. It is provided as a help to the reading of the new "General Directory for Catechesis" (GDC) as an aid to its reception and implementation in both Catholic parishes and Catholic schools. It presumes that churches and schools want to engage in evangelizing catechesis to promote adult faith for a mature church. Following an exploration of three practical situations or contexts for evangelization illustrated through three distinct life stories, the book reviews the evolution of the understanding of evangelization found in selected church documents. It also probes some specific practical ways to answer the two guiding questions: what is evangelizing catechesis, and how can it pervade and enrich the work and what effect can the "catechumenal model" have on the life of the church and all efforts to welcome and form people in faith? Chapters in the book are: (1) "Catechesis, Evangelization and a New Catechetical Directory"; (2) "Three Real Life Stories, Three Senses of Evangelization Treated in the GDC"; (3) "Catechumenate as Inspiration for Evangelizing Catechesis"; (4) "Some Questions and Implications for Parish and School Leaders: Challenges to a Mature Church"; and (5) "Conclusion: A Letter from the Future." Includes sources for further reading. (BT)

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Catechesis As an Evangelizing Moment

Singular Challenge to a Maturing Church

Michael P. Horan, Ph.D.

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Singular Challenge to a Maturing Church

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Acknowledgements

Pope John Paul II through the development and publication of *General Directory for Catechesis* (GDC, 1997) has called upon the entire Church to embrace the challenge of what he calls a "new evangelization."

In the United States, bishops, diocesan leaders, parish and school leaders have all welcomed the arrival of this important and visionary document. It has led to national, regional and local level meetings to explain the purpose and content of the *GDC* as well as its implementation.

At the NCEA, the department of religious education through the leadership of its members in the Chief Administrators of Catholic Education (CACE/NCDRE) and the National Association for Parish Catechetical Directors (NPCD) has studied the GDC, sponsored workshops and written articles about it. In November 1998, the department executive committee decided to develop a resource that would examine the *GDC's* description of evangelization and its relationship with catechesis. Joan Kulik, director of the Catechetical Institute in the diocese of Orange, California, graciously volunteered to chair this project. In discussing a possible author, the committee was fortunate in its selection of Dr. Michael Horan of Loyola-Marymount University in Los Angeles, California who accepted the committee's invitation.

As the project progressed, Joan called on the assistance of: Dr. Joseph Sinwell, diocesan director, diocese of Providence and CACE/NCDRE president; RI, Charlotte Sutherland, parish catechetical director, St. Louise Parish, Bellevue, WA and NPCD vice president; Dr. Frank Lucido, secretary of education, diocese of Corpus Christi, TX, Lois DeFelice, parish catechetical director, St. Cyprian Parish, River Grove, IL; Ronald Pihokker, diocesan director, Archdiocese of Newark, NJ; Paul Cooper, parish catechetical director, St. Margaret Mary Alacoque, St. Louis, MO; Sr. Joseph Spring, assistant superintendent, Diocese of Paterson, NJ and elementary department representative and James Hamburge, president, Benilde-St. Margaret School, St. Louis Park, MN and secondary department representative.

On behalf of the NCEA, I want to thank Dr. Michael Horan for the wealth of knowledge and pastoral sensitivity he exhibited in his treatment of the essential issues related to evangelization and catechesis. I am certain that diocesan, school and parish leaders will find this text on the relationship between evangelization and catechesis an excellent resource for all those involved in catechetical ministry and religious education at all levels. Joan Kulik and the committee members mentioned above also deserve credit for the input and suggestions that they gave to Dr. Horan in the final stages of the text. Finally, I want to thank Steve Palmer, Beatriz Ruiz, Mary Twillman and Phyllis Kokus for their expertise with the cover, text design and production of the text.

Robert Colbert
Executive Director
Department of Religious Education

Preface

This book is written for anyone who seeks to help people to embrace and grow in faith. It is provided as a help to the reading of the new *General Directory for Catechesis* (GDC) as an aid to its reception and implementation in both parishes and schools. Throughout this essay I will presume that churches and schools want to engage in evangelizing catechesis to promote adult faith for a mature church, but I will not presume that all the readers engage in direct ministry to adults. I presume that the majority of Catholic lay and ordained ministers who read this essay are educators and parish leaders in school and/or church settings. The essay includes questions for reflection and discussion, so that leaders in parishes and schools may use it in groups that study the GDC and want to plan activities and ministry with a view to the directory. The Directory is rich and nearly overwhelming in the possibilities that can be mined from its resources. This brief essay treats two important facets of the new directory found in the following two questions:

- What is *evangelizing catechesis*, and how can it pervade and enrich our work?
- What effect can the "*catechumenal model*" have on the life of the church and all our efforts to welcome and form people in faith?

The Plan of This Book

Following a review of the important terms that shape a reading of the *GDC*, we will explore the various meanings of evangelization as found in the *GDC* and consider the roots of those meanings. Following an exploration of three practical situations or contexts for evangelization illustrated through three distinct life stories, we will review the evolution of the understanding of evangelization found in selected church documents, and probe some specific practical ways to answer the two guiding questions noted above. Throughout this essay parenthetical references to the *GDC* correspond to numbered paragraphs found in the *GDC* (published by the United States Catholic Conference, Washington, D.C., 1997). References to all other church documents are taken from *The Catechetical Documents* (Edited by Martin Connell, published by Liturgy Training Publications, Chicago, IL, 1996).

Chapter_1

Catechesis, Evangelization and a New Catechetical Directory

- What is Catechesis?
- What is Evangelization?
- What is the GDC?

Since the publication of the *General Directory for Catechesis* (1997), United States Catholic leaders have been reassessing the state of catechesis in the nation. Much has occurred in the more than three decades since Vatican II. There have been many changes: the focus on adult catechesis, the rise of the catechumenate, the proliferation of lay ministry formation programs and the placement of religious education in the larger context of pastoral ministry, the increased number of lay educators and administrators in Catholic schools and parish programs. All these changes began with profound changes that are associated with Vatican II. These changes in catechesis continue as phenomena that affect the whole church. In the wake of these changes let us review three important concepts that foster the church's faith development: *Catechesis, Evangelization, and the GDC.*

What is Catechesis?

The term *catechesis* comes from a Greek word that means "to resound from above," in the way that poets and actors might speak from a stage and delight their hearers by stretching their imaginations. As a ministry of the Word, catechesis refers to a constellation of activities that promote, enhance and challenge believers toward more mature faith. The term was used in the early church to denote the holistic and gradual initiation into a community that reached its high point in the Easter Vigil. Its cognate term, "catechumenate," refers to the explicit process of initiation, and is known to Catholics because of the renewed rite of initiation, termed "RCIA" in church bulletins throughout the land. This rite of *Christian Initiation of Adults* is patterned on the ancient church's process of invitation and welcome into a community of disciples with eyes fixed on the Pascal mystery and the meaning it can inject into life. This welcome occurs through the process of sponsorship and preparation. It continues in baptism, anointing and feasting at the Eucharistic table. The threefold sacramental celebration has occurred at the Easter Vigil dating back to the earliest centuries. We shall see as we study the *GDC* that catechetical planning within Catholicism presumes that the sharing of faith between individuals and the larger life of the community go hand in hand. Indeed faith as it matures in an individual's journey takes place in community; it is not really possible to nurture one without the other. Conversion to Christ takes place in an ecclesial context. Indeed catechesis itself is the task of the whole church (*GDC* 78, 158).

Official church documents and the pastoral experience of many catechetical leaders concur that catechesis is not just for children, that it does not take place only in school and that it is intimately connected to the communal life of the church. It is not an individual affair. The *GDC* affirms all this by recapitulating many of the assertions from earlier church statements and the wisdom of pastoral agents in the field of catechesis.

What is Evangelization?

The term evangelization does not trip off the tongues of Catholics with any degree of ease. It is the term that (like its cognate "evangelical") seems to be popularly associated with groups of Christians who place great value in sharing the Word of God as found in the bible. Moreover, the term conjures images of aggressive recruitment, zeal in converting persons to membership in a church where the recruiters have found great meaning and deep joy. Sometimes people associate the term with television preaching and religious programming. In Catholic circles before the second Vatican Council the bible clearly was affirmed, along with tradition, as the font of revelation. But hardly ever did the bible function as the centerpiece of daily spirituality for laypersons. In the world of my pre-Vatican II boyhood we thought of "evangelization" as aggressive recruitment of those in need of the grace of baptism; we associated evangelization with missionary efforts to convert people by baptizing them into "the one true" Church.

Clearly the world and the church have changed since that day some forty years ago when Pope John XXIII announced the planning stage for an ecumenical council. Something new is dawning in the consciousness of Catholic Christians. We are retrieving the root meaning of the term evangelization, which comes from a Greek word meaning gospel, good news. As Catholics recommit ourselves to experiencing Christ in Word and Sacrament, in the individual experience of faith and the communal dimension of conversion, our church leaders also are calling us to mine the depth of meaning beneath the phenomenon of evangelization.

Evangelization has received serious attention in the years following Vatican II. From the publication of the council's document *Ad Gentes*, the Conciliar decree on missionary activity, through the post-Conciliar papal statements and the statements of bishops' conferences, much ink has been spilled over the meaning of evangelization. It is clear that the term means more than it might have to most Catholics before the council. But what, and why now? In order to respond to these questions, and to place them in context, we need to notice that something newer still

has happened in the new *General Directory for Catechesis*. Let's begin by considering this important document.

The GDC: What is It?

The *GDC* was published in 1997 by the Sacred Congregation for the Clergy. The publication of a catechetical directory is an important moment in the recent history of Catholic life. A directory is a set of guidelines and principles that aid persons who undertake the ministry of sharing faith with others through a variety of means. A directory provides governing principles for establishing and enhancing catechesis as an important activity in the church. The *GDC* points particular churches toward the renewal of catechesis and acts as a reference for content, pedagogy and methodology (*GDC* 2). In this way the directory sets and expands the vision for catechesis.

But we would be naïve not to notice that it represents a relatively new genre for literature about the ministry of catechesis. The *GDC* is the second general directory. It followed the first directory, published in 1971 by the Sacred Congregation for the Clergy. The first directory (called the *General Catechetical Directory*) was a precedent in genre and style. That directory was the result of a contribution on the floor of the second Vatican Council by Bishop Pierre Lacointe of Beauvais, France. Lacointe anticipated the concerns of some of the council fathers, who, wanting to take up the unfinished business of Vatican I, encouraged the composition of a catechism for the universal church. Lacointe knew the history of the debates at Vatican I concerning the merits of a catechism and the needs of particular churches. In speaking to the assembly at Vatican II, Lacointe relied on his experience of the church in France, where he saw the value and effectiveness of establishing a set of guidelines and governing principles that would set the vision for the ministry of catechesis.

A directory is quite different from a catechism. A catechism, by contrast, summarizes the content to be communicated through catechesis, but it does not offer the larger social and ecclesial context for the ministry in the first place. Lacointe's suggestion for a directory took hold in

the spirit of the council, and the drafting of the *General Catechetical Directory* came to fulfillment in 1971. Since the promulgation of that first directory, Catholics in the United States responded with the implementation of guidelines for the church in the United States in the form of the National Catechetical Directory, entitled *Sharing the Light of Faith*, published in 1979.

While much has been written about the first *General Catechetical Directory* (1971) and about *Sharing the Light of Faith*, for our purposes it is important to note the relationship between evangelization and catechesis as articulated in the new *GDC*. What is striking about the *GDC*, in contrast with the earlier general and national directories, is that it names *evangelization as the overarching context for the ministry of catechesis*. The *GDC* broadens the scope of evangelization and has us re-imagine catechesis as "an essential moment" in the overall process of evangelization. What does that mean? From whence the change? How does it affect contemporary approaches to faith formation? What does the changed relationship actually mean for both evangelization and catechesis, and what does it mean for leaders in church and educational settings? How would such a reconception affect our own imaginings, structures, and activities on behalf of the gospel?

For Reflection and Discussion

- As you consider your own growth in faith, how has your understanding of God or your spirituality changed in the last five years? Last ten years? Since you were a child?
- Take a moment to imagine your parish or local faith community. As you do so, what features of that community help to "form" the faith of people? What activities? What helps to form *your* faith?

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Chapter_2

Three Real Life Stories, Three Senses of Evangelization Treated in the GDC

- Elizabeth's Story
- Carlos' and Martina's Story
- Meg's Story
- Evangelizing Catechesis in the GDC

Elizabeth's Story

Elizabeth, a native of California, is a Catholic high school English teacher. She is not involved in the church. She never has been involved. Her parents moved to California from the Midwest where they had grown up in the Lutheran church, and where they worshipped for a while out of obligation to their parents. When Elizabeth's parents moved to California they rejected that part of their upbringing, and raised Elizabeth to "think for herself" without the constraints of an

organized religion. At the age of twenty-seven, she is rarely asked about religion, but when the topic comes up, Elizabeth identifies herself as "nothing" when it comes to religious affiliation. Her interest in spiritual topics is both real and respectful, and she is curious about the Catholics with whom she works. Elizabeth knows that she finds in Catholic school education something "more" than she can actually name about the "tone" or "spirit" of the school. She is attracted to the sense of community in her school environment and to the agenda of social justice that appears to ignite the hearts of some of the faculty and the campus ministers.

As she continues her association with the school, Elizabeth even has been asked by the retreat committee to help with the junior class daylong retreat. She is fond of many students from this class, and she is curious about "spirituality" (as she understands that term used in the popular culture). However, she is nervous about involvement in a retreat that suggests an "official" connection to the church. She would like to become involved in the walk for hunger committee, as she is attracted to that kind of justice work and to the people who do it.

Carlos' and Martina's Story

Carlos and Martina have been married for nine years. They met on a Catholic retreat at a vibrant Chicago parish that reaches out to young adults. Carlos was born and raised in the rural southeastern part of the United States, where being Catholic meant minority status, a condition that Martina can hardly imagine. In the Argentina of her youth, being Catholic was as natural for Martina as breathing or dancing or eating good food! Carlos and Martina love their faith life and want to share it with their children. Their son Caleb has begun first grade at the local parish school in suburban Chicago.

For both Carlos and Martina, faith is very important. They have never really wandered far from the spiritual roots that their parents gave them; they find great solace and challenge in their adult faith. Both have a first rate education and a promising career in business. Their spiritual needs are both simple and profound, while differing

markedly from the "simple faith" of their parents. They want and expect a vibrant faith community that celebrates a vibrant liturgy. They also expect a friendly forum for the pursuit of their questions about spirituality. Their theological questions are quite sophisticated, fueled by the questions of young persons whom they meet in their volunteer involvement in the parish youth ministry program

Meg's Story

Meg cannot remember a time when she wavered from her love of sports. And she loves coaching; she was a coach at Bishop Pachomius before she even completed college. Her Irish American roots planted her firmly and early in the Catholicism of her parents, but she never heard the gospel above the din of the church. She knew that some people experienced real spiritual peace through their church membership; in fact, some of her family members experience profound meaning in their interactions with the church. Meg never has.

Meg sees the church as a repressive structure, one that cannot possibly communicate any of the good that it claims. Moreover, Meg routinely points out in her "discussions" with family members that she has always understood the rules and the regulations of the church, even the ones that she regards as repressive (on sexuality) and oppressive (on women). But she does not understand the people who claim that religion is a means to an end. *What* end? What do they feel when they believe? Where is this "good news" to which they refer? What does it feel like to experience that? In short, Meg is a "card carrying" Catholic. She has been baptized and even catechized. She has been socialized into a community's ways of speaking and acting, but she has never experienced the gospel, the good news that is the reason for it all. Meg has all the external supports to be a Catholic Christian, but she wonders if religion can provide anything more than false answers to important human questions.

Each of these stories — of Elizabeth, Carlos and Martina, and Meg — tell us about real people who are closely associated with the church and its structures, including the church's pastoral and educational

structures. Many of the people with whom we live and work, real persons who are dedicated and caring and about whom we care, are like one or another of the persons in the stories just told. Perhaps they are like Elizabeth, and they have not "heard" (or seen) the gospel preached in any explicit way. Or perhaps they are like Martina and Carlos, living their lives of faith joyfully in the hope of growing more deeply in love with God and life and each other. Or perhaps they, like Meg, find no particular meaning at the core of all the external rules, policies and ways of life that form the outer expression of faith. Whatever their stance toward faith, the people in these stories represent many more like them, people of faith and no explicit faith, who long for more than they now have or know. It is to all of these people that evangelization is directed.

For Reflection and Discussion

- Name a person in your life or ministry whose situation resembles one or some of the persons in the previous stories.
- In what sense does their interaction with *you* make the gospel more *real* to them?
- In what ways do they know about your faith commitments? How would they describe you in your expression of faith to others? What do they "need" most from you in that setting?

Evangelizing Catechesis in the GDC

Each of three senses of evangelization is taken up in the *General Directory for Catechesis* (*GDC* 58). The first sense of the term evangelization presumes that the gospel needs to be "preached" to the one who has not heard it. This meaning of the term has often been used to describe missionary efforts in far away places. The truth is that the United States is also fertile ground for the "preaching" of the Word. The gospel does not always have to be proclaimed in word; sometimes it is best understood through action. In either case, the notion that evange-

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lization is the activity that invites people to initial faith is a time honored and long-standing one. (*GDC* 58a)

The second sense of evangelization found in the *GDC* is quite different. Here the writers of the document draw attention to the needs of people like Carlos and Martina and their child, all of whom need and deserve the support of a vibrant faith community that provides moments and activities that foster maturing faith. They are part of the church communities that have a "profound Christian outlook." (*GDC* 58b)

Finally, the document refers to another facet of evangelization that is sometimes referred to as "the new evangelization" because it refers to a new understanding of the term. New evangelization is the term used in papal statements in the past thirty years that underscore the need to share good news on home shores as well as in foreign lands with those persons who do not perceive the good news as good. Like Meg, there are many baptized persons and even entire groups of baptized persons who, in the words of the Directory, "...have lost a living sense of the faith, or even no longer consider themselves members of the Church and live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel." (*GDC*, 58c).

From Whence the Concern? Church Documents on Evangelization

The *GDC* makes clear that evangelization is first and foremost at the heart of the mission of the church. Its is the *raison d'être* for the church, the very reason for its existence. But why this interest in the term to begin with? In this section we turn to a brief treatment of some core church documents that aid us in reading the *General Directory for Catechesis* with a view to history. We will consider three approaches to evangelization in the course of this treatment of various documents.

1. Redefining the Borders: Evangelization Inside the Culture (The Story of Elizabeth)

In the *Decree on the Missionary Activity in the Church* of the Second Vatican Council (*Ad Gentes*), the activity of evangelization is identified as central to the church's mission and faithfulness to the call of Christ (AG 5). According to this document, the activity that constitutes

evangelization is an unfinished work, because the number of people who have never or barely heard the Gospel increases day by day" (AG 10). The document goes on to describe these increasing numbers of persons: "...some belong to one or other of the great religions, others have no knowledge of God, while others expressly deny the existence of God and sometimes even attack it (AG 10). The writers of *Ad Gentes* locate the proclamation of the gospel to all peoples at the heart of the church's mission (AG 5) and describe the threefold task of evangelization as *the witness of the Christian life, the formation of community, and the proclamation of the gospel.* (AG 11-15). This threefold description — *witness, formation of community, and proclamation* — broadens the idea of evangelization beyond explicit preaching to the way of life of the believers.

Here we see a theme that will be developed throughout later documents and in the pastoral emphases of missionaries in faraway places as well as pastoral agents on home shores. Even in describing missionary activity the document's writers want us to know that proclamation cannot be separated from "human nature and aspiration." (AG 8). So while the decree on missionary activity takes concerns that lie beyond home borders, it also stretches us to imagine evangelization as a reality that is not exhausted by explicit preaching of the gospel. It summons us to creativity in the expression of faith so that people like Elizabeth in our first story, who may reside within the cultural and geographic borders of the United States, can "hear" the gospel proclaimed by the witness of individual lives and the corporate vitality of the community of Christian faith.

Clearly *Ad Gentes* announced a theological shift. Prior to the second Vatican Council, missionary activity had customarily been associated with sharing good news with those who had never heard it. But it is patently clear to anyone in the United States today that the U.S. church also can find many persons right within our own borders who are unaware of the Christian story. More to the point, we can find people who have vaguely heard the story through the cultural lens of television and the rituals associated with religious holidays, but they have hardly ever heard the *saving* story in its integrity. People like Elizabeth have lived

within the borders of the United States but they have never been invited to explore seriously or to adopt the religious perspective of Catholic Christianity in an attractive and real way. Elizabeth's story suggests that the borders and boundaries that "missionaries" cross today may reside within our own back yards, in workplaces and neighborhoods, inside the circle of friendships that we maintain and the people whom we support.

The wisdom found in *Ad Gentes* is reflected in other conciliar documents from Vatican II. Especially clear is the call of the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)*, to attend to the needs of persons in their joys and hopes, grief and anguish. (GS 1) If we take the spirit of Vatican II and the documents seriously, then the proclamation of the reign of God occurs within the realm of attitudes and behaviors, in the witness of individuals and communities. We Christians who do not share our faith are indicted by that possibility. Therefore the call to go beyond the borders may actually leave us in our own geographic places but move us beyond the confines of our ways of doing things, to forge a new attitude toward living our faith in authentic and compelling ways.

For Reflection and Discussion

- How do the three perspectives on evangelization manifest themselves in your ministry? Your friends and family members? Your spirituality and your own need to "hear" the gospel?
- In your experience, when has your community of faith (or family or parish) "expressed" the heart of faith most effectively? How? What forms did that expression take? Describe the scene to yourself and then to someone else in conversation.
- What would that scene communicate to a non-believer about the heart of the gospel? Where were you in that scene?

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2. Evangelization: Ongoing and Integrative (The Story of Carlos and Martina)

If evangelization were directed only to those who have not heard or embraced the gospel, then our work would be done. But the truth is wider and more complicated. The second sense or situation for evangelization "teaches" us that evangelization is not something we possess as a finished product to be distributed among the others by us who possess it. Far from it! Evangelization is an experience, it is the salt of the gospel reality that vivifies, giving life and flavor to all that we say or do. While the gospel has an explicit content that must be communicated in words, at its core is an experience, an experience of God poured out in Jesus the Christ, who now resides within us through the Spirit. Christ is experienced in Spirit, and that Spirit is embodied in a church that acts on behalf of justice.

In his 1975 apostolic exhortation, *On Evangelization in the Modern World (Evangelii Nuntiandi)* Pope Paul VI took up concern for evangelization in response to the international synod of bishops held in 1974. Significantly, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* develops the idea that evangelization is something done by the entire church; it is not the private preserve of missionaries or "official" individual evangelizers. As an ecclesial activity, it has the power to witness to the Spirit that unites the believers as One Body of Christ. Individuals certainly bear responsibility for evangelization, but this occurs as the outgrowth of one's baptism into a community.

For Reflection and Discussion

- How would you explain to an inquirer just exactly what is the core idea beneath Jesus' proclamation of the reign of God?
- When you consider the present situation of society and the church, where/how is the reign of God most apparent today? Where/how is it conspicuously absent?
- Name two creative ways to support people like Carlos and Martina.

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The writers of the *GDC* remind us that Jesus is the first evangelizer, proclaiming the reign of God as the "urgent and definitive intervention of God in history." (*GDC* 34) God's reign is a reign of justice, like the reign of paradox and reversals narrated in Mary's Magnificat. Within this reign the lowly are raised high and the proud are cast down, the rich are sent empty away while the hungry are fed rich fare. Jesus not only preached God's reign; he embodied it in placing the last first, and the first last, and in hoping in God's promises in the garden of Gethsemani. The perennial task of the disciple is to link human liberation and salvation; both are intimately connected at the heart of the gospel proclamation of God's reign. (EN 34, 35)

For Reflection and Discussion

- Recall a time when you felt most challenged by the gospel. What were the circumstances? WHY do you think that you found challenge in the gospel?

3. New Evangelization: Reconciling/Acknowledging the Alienation (The Story of Meg)

The third sense of evangelization that also affects catechesis is the one that is often called the new evangelization. In the story of Meg, we see an example of the familiar pastoral situation in which good people who have been catechized do not actually accept or believe that which they "know" from their catechesis. How ironic! We once imagined that evangelization preceded catechesis. Yet we now know from the experience of people like Meg that catechesis which does not also evangelize may lead to resentment and alienation, and rejection of the message. This situation functions as an indictment of our culture, with its multifaceted creed of materialism and greed. But the situation also indicts past practices in the church. These practices were built on the zeal of catechists and church leaders, parents, and friends who equated dispensing knowledge of "the faith" with inviting people to freely embrace faith. But history teaches us that catechesis without conversion is not

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really lasting, and that catechesis comprises more than memorizing the answers to questions that participants do not have.

Pastoral agents can cite many examples of past hurts narrated by those who are predisposed to return to the church and to take a second look. Thanks to the compassion and skill of such pastoral ministers, many people like Meg find the very thing that eluded them earlier in their lives. But what can we imagine for those who do not have much curiosity or hunger for the community of their childhood? Perhaps it is precisely in the attention to issues of social justice that the community gives its most authentic life witness. The issues that touch on the social ills of our day cross the boundaries of religious difference; they provide opportunities for Christians to engage with people of good will who desire a social order that is consistent with the justice and peace that Christ brings.

Catechesis as an Evangelizing "Moment"

Pope John Paul II's apostolic exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae*, published in 1977, teaches that catechesis moves beyond the first proclamation of evangelization, with a view to initiating believers into the fullness of Christian life. (CT, 18) Catechesis, according to *Catechesi Tradendae*, is a moment in the complex of moments that comprise conversion, with evangelization named as initial proclamation. But this distinction is helpful only in a theoretical way, as we know from knowing our own needs and the needs of people like Carlos and Martina. (*GDC* 62) The need for catechesis that is ongoing and occasional, that is integrated with the liturgy and the life of service that embodies Jesus' commitment to the reign of God, is a perennial need for all disciples.

The catechumenate has provided Catholic Christians with some features of catechesis that warrant attention and implementation. Let us turn to a specific reference to the catechumenate found in the *GDC* for clues to the renewal of all catechesis as evangelizing catechesis.

Chapter_3

Catechumenate as Inspiration for Evangelizing Catechesis

- Objectives of the Catechumenate
- Dynamism of the Catechumenate
- Summary

The *GDC* identifies the baptismal catechumenal formation as an inspiration for other forms of catechesis in both their *objectives* and *dynamism*. (*GDC* 59) That phrase deserves much attention, but in view of the description of catechesis as an evangelizing "moment" we might wonder about its potential for influencing the diocesan and parish (and even school) community. Let us consider in turn the "objectives" and "dynamism" of the catechumenate so that we might suggest a few implications for the leaders and participants in the diocesan, parish, and school settings.

For Reflection and Discussion

- Name a time in your own life when you experienced the death of a loved one or a profound loss of any kind. How did you experience resurrection because of that death or loss?

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Objectives of the Catechumenate

The objectives of the catechumenate are several. We will briefly name and treat two objectives: Conversion to discipleship and mature adult faith. First and foremost, the catechumenate has as its objective the conversion of disciples to the Pascal mystery of Christ. The pattern of Christ's dying and rising fosters mature discipleship to the degree that lives are patterned on the mystery that is celebrated in the liturgical culmination of the catechumenate. The mystery is ritualized in baptism into the death and resurrection of Christ, anointing in the Spirit and communion with the believers in the breaking of the bread. The Pascal mystery recapitulates the life and teaching of Jesus the Christ, because it is fraught with paradox: the one who loses one's life finds it; if you wish to be first in the kingdom you must serve the needs of the rest; the last shall be first. Conversion to this kind of thinking and living is as rich and rewarding as it is challenging. It calls us to real change, not in words but in action.

The objective of conversion, however, warrants some discussion. What does conversion look like? Ask anyone who has ministered to others through the adult catechumenate, and the answers vary widely. There is no one way to encounter the love of God poured out in Christ, and there is no ready formula for the "right" narration of what it means to turn one's life toward Christ. Hence there is a crucial need to tell the story of one's coming to faith and to recognize God's hand in that journey toward more mature faith.

The objective of conversion might also be considered alongside the numerous references to adult faith found in the *GDC* in order to light up this gift of diversity in the members of the Body of Christ and in their varied expressions of faith. Interestingly the writers of the *GDC* reiterate earlier works that point to the goal of mature adult faith for catechesis and for an adult church. (See *GDC*, 171-176) In fact, in describing age appropriate catechesis, the writers of the *GDC* begin by describing adult catechesis, recognizing that all stages of catechesis need to lead to integration of faith throughout life. (*GDC* 171-172) This placement of adults first in the narrative order of the directory (as opposed to a narrative about developing faith in chronological order from

birth to old age) may aid the church in actually placing adults first in the perspective of catechetical leaders' planning and developing. This would bolster a community's efforts to foster faith for people of all ages. *How* can that be done in a way that fosters everyone's growth in faith, no matter what age or length of days since one's baptism? Perhaps we can find help in answering that question by considering the *dynamism* of the catechumenate. Two features suggest something of the dynamism that could affect all catechesis. They are its liturgical context, and the challenge to the community to be the agent of catechesis.

Dynamism of the Catechumenate

First and foremost, the catechumenate inspires catechesis because it is, at its core, liturgical in context. It flows from and into the liturgical life of the whole community. It does not occur in isolation from the community, and it is not regarded as an arm or program of the church's activity. It is as central to the church's activity of praise as the Pascal mystery is central to the church's spirituality. As such the catechumenate exercises the wonderful capacity to renew the entire church — to evangelize the long-standing members — even as it welcomes the newcomers. What would all catechesis look like if it began in and flowed back to the liturgy of the community? What potential is there in imagining all catechesis in that same "dynamism"?

Second, the catechumenate is the primary vehicle for welcoming *adults* into the community of faith. In this dynamic, the catechumenate provides inspiration for all catechesis but it also provides challenge. For the catechumenate not only places importance on fostering mature adult faith among all its members, it places responsibility for fostering faith where it properly belongs: at the feet of *all the members of the community, especially other adults.* Pastoral agents routinely report great "success" in welcoming people into a faith community through the catechumenate. But some catechists and community leaders also report great frustration with the larger community of faith. They note that the candidates choose to move forward toward baptism because they have found something wonderful in their period of preparation; they have found a caring community in the small circle of candidates

and sponsors. Disappointment, however, can visit quickly and settle in for a long time; the disappointment can even begin shortly after the lilies from the Easter vigil have faded. Welcoming the newly baptized into something more is the challenge of each community. It also is related to the challenge to place the responsibility at the feet of all the church's members.

For Reflection

- How do you understand conversion? How does the staff or team or faculty with whom you work understand conversion? Invite two or three persons to reflect on their own conversion process and consider the unique as well as common features in those stories.

To Summarize

We have seen that the official documents of the church concur with the collective wisdom of pastoral ministers that evangelization has shifted *from something we do to others to a spirit that vivifies the church*, a spirit and truth that we experience ourselves when we faithfully reflect and point to the reign of God. Further, evangelization has shifted from *something that we have and give to others* to *a shared reality* that increases in the sharing throughout our lives. Moreover, if the good news is to be reawakened in us throughout our faith lives, then evangelization does not happen prior to catechesis exclusively, but must vivify the life of faith throughout our existence.

Everyone is in need of evangelization. Evangelization is bound up in who we are as well as how we act/interact with others. It is intimately bound to the context of the church and the individual, and the "work" of evangelization is much wider than explicit preaching of the gospel in words. Evangelization, like catechesis, is lifelong. If catechesis is understood as a moment in the process, then it must be understood as an often repeatable moment, one that arises out of the need of the com-

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munity, that is organic as well as lifelong. Catechesis must be understood as the holistic activity that supports faith development and the explicit coming to terms with the experience of God in and through a community of faith.

We have also seen that "evangelizing catechesis" as a central value shifts the weight from *imagining these activities as isolated "programs"* to *imagining them as intimately connected to the church's central act of praise, the Eucharist.* It shifts the responsibility from *the few "experts" in catechetics* (in the parish, or the religious studies teachers in the school) to *the community of disciples* (in the parish, or the entire faculty and student community in the school) who share responsibility for the building up of the Body of Christ as well as for the proclamation of God's reign in the world. It broadens the field of light that the gospel sheds on the world, bathing its light beyond *the spotlight of the church* exclusively to *the reign of God,* which the church desires to reflect in the world.

Chapter_4

Some Questions and Implications for Parish and School Leaders: Challenges to a Mature Church

The following questions emerge from our reading of the *GDC* around the issue of evangelizing catechesis. They may be used for reflection and discussion with parish teams, faculty and staffs of schools and in other ministry settings as deemed appropriate:

- What would our catechetical activities look like if they were geared to the enrichment in faith of those who are already committed, those who want something more than a homily on Sunday and an occasional offering of courses through the parish?
- What is the rightful place of action on behalf of justice in the church's life and in the adult faith of adults?
- What can catechetical leaders do to support the genuine search of those who desire justice for the world?

- What can catechetical leaders do to challenge those who think justice in the world is only marginally related to adult faith?
- What potential is there in the parents' associations of various schools to offer ways for parents to connect around issues of faith for themselves?
- What role could the Internet play in the establishment of communities of conversation about the important spiritual questions of adults who want more than parish programs have offered?
- What would our parish and school "programs" look like if families were to take the opportunities to acquaint themselves with one another's faith concerns through their own interactions, instead of waiting to receive direction from the central office, the DRE or the principal?
- How can existing activities reach the faith questions of those who seek to explore genuinely theological topics without the fear that they might arrive at the wrong answers?
- How can catechesis aid the ongoing evangelization of the believers?
- How can cultures, in the words of *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, "be regenerated by an encounter with the Gospel"? (EN 20)

More questions than answers! And what do all these questions have in common? They converge on the concern for the reign of God, and they presume a church of mature faith. If the real goal of evangelization is the good news, the experience of God reigning in our lives, and we identify that experience with a reign of justice, then the works of justice are not embellishments, add-ons to the life of faith or to the content of catechesis. From the ancient church's practice of service to widows and orphans, to the church's commitment in the modern era to the reordering of our world's priorities around gospel values, the clarion call to social justice resounds. Justice action and reflection are essential elements of the religious life of people who want to encounter afresh the evangelizing truth of the Christian message.

Evangelization is not the business of the few. It is the privilege and the responsibility of all. This means that adult disciples can no longer look to a church "out there" to assume responsibility for the present and future of the world. The church is not a "they" because *we are the church*. The fulfillment of the reign of God, the kingdom, is God's doing in God's time. But we adult Christians abandon our baptismal call if the demands of justice and the pressing needs of humanity fall on deaf ears.

If Catholic parishes and schools are to be centers of faith, doing catechesis as a moment within the larger mission of evangelization, then the works of justice are neither optional nor marginal to the mission of the school. And those works are not the purview of a committee, the work of a few. In schools it is particularly important that catechesis take place not only for those who are Catholics but also for those who have the freedom either to embrace Christian faith in the Catholic tradition *or* simply to be exposed to the world of faith that impels Catholics to action. The school exists within the mission of the church to evangelize. Catechesis as a moment within that larger scheme means that a variety of liturgical, justice and service activities are not extraneous to the "main event" of religious education. Rather, they take place within the larger context, the only legitimate context for the school, the faith life of the larger church.

Like Carlos and Martina, many adults who are involved in Catholic education understand and esteem their faith. Many of the adults who labor in churches and Catholic schools understand their labor as evangelization, but they may not explicitly name it as such. Staff and faculty development therefore is essential if talk of evangelization is to become and remain more than pretty words. It is also essential to reach out to those who have not heard the Word, or who have not heard it as good. Elizabeth has no occasion to notice the Christians who stay exclusively within their own walls, and Meg will find no reason to take a second look inside those walls if she does not encounter faith in her midst.

Because of the nature of education and its need for specialization, we also need to be honest and note that not all faculty members in Catholic schools are initially evangelized. More widely known is the

situation that calls for "new evangelization" of the hurt or alienated faculty members. The stories of Elizabeth and Meg are real and relevant to the experience of many Catholic school leaders. The greatest resource for Catholic schools is their faculty. The dedication of people to do the work of education is an energy that can be harnessed for the good of the reign of God. That happens to the degree that the faculty is *formed* in the mission of evangelization. But formation, while subtle, is systematic and deliberate. It happens through conscious planning. And it happens through courageous steps taken by leaders.

Chapter_5

Conclusion: A Letter from the Future

We have considered only a few of the riches to be mined in the reading, study, reflection and conversation around the new *GDC*. As we imagine the future of catechesis in this country we can predict with some confidence that the new directory will function as an important marker in the history of our efforts to share good news in new forms, new wine in new wineskins. Perhaps it is best to conclude our brief study of the *GDC* and the meaning of "evangelizing catechesis" by dreaming together of the future. Let us imagine that the year is 2017 A.D. Two full decades have passed since the publication of the *GDC*. Let us further imagine that the following letter has been sent from a recently retired catechetical leader, written to her (now adult) godchild who has taken up the ministry of catechesis. The letter, dated 2017 AD, describes what happened in the church in the United States as a result of the reception and implementation of the *GDC* from 2000 forward.

Pentecost 2017

Dear Elena,

On the occasion of your graduation from college it truly is a delight and an honor to wish you happiness and continued fulfillment in your life. I am particularly proud that you are a catechist today, and that you aspire to follow in the footsteps of so many generous lay persons who have functioned as catechetical leaders in the church.

The prophet Joel writes that young people will see visions and old ones will dream dreams. As you "commence" a new chapter of your young life, I want to share with you the musings of a woman who has seen much in the development of catechesis in the United States over the course of a long life. And I want to share with you something of my dreams for the future of the church, a future that clearly is on your path if not yet within your reach.

Elena, I know you have studied the Second Vatican Council, that incredible event that took place over thirty years before you were born. Such an event must seem remote and vague to you, yet I cannot sufficiently emphasize how it changed my life and the life of our church. It certainly changed the ministry of catechesis.... The *ministry* of catechesis. Elena, that term, *ministry*, that you use so often in your speech, that term was a new one for many Catholics who only began to use it with any regularity after Vatican II. Why, when I was a girl, the only minister I knew was Reverend Johnson; he was from the Methodist church down the street. We Catholics had priests, but no ministers, certainly not "lay ministers" as we do today. It is probably hard for you to imagine a time when we did not talk fluidly about ministry as the call of baptized Christians like you, who respond.

As you respond to your call to catechetical leadership, I want to share with you the importance of another event that you will scarcely remember: The celebration of a new millennium. It now

seems old and perhaps quaint to you, a piece of your early childhood, but at the time it was an incredible moment for the country and for the church.

One of the important features of that event was our church's renewed attention to evangelization in our church. Prior to that renewed attention, we Catholics tended to imagine evangelization as television and street preaching! That was the image that we harbored, silly as it now sounds. We had not yet grasped the fundamental insight that evangelization is everyone's responsibility in baptism, and that it has as much to do with HOW we live the gospel than WHAT we do or say. You see, Elena, around the turn of the new millennium we began to understand that the gospel message is the key to everything. The CORE of the gospel is the thing, the only thing that really attracts people to a relationship with God in Jesus Christ. The practices and the liturgies, the rules and the policies of our church are important. But you know well that people your age have no particular interest in a church that lacks soul, one that seems empty even when it is packed with bodies, or strong on words when it is weak on serving the poor. Well, Elena, we Catholics rededicated ourselves to that vision around the time of the new millennium.

The result was a renewed attention to the ways in which adults grow in their spirituality, the ways in which the gospel can be experienced in the world and must be "preached" by the quality of commitment to the reign of God, a reign of justice *in the world*. The result was a more "evangelizing" church, one whose corporate witness and communal life *challenged* as well as *invited* people to conversion of heart, to fresh attention to the reign of God. We listened to the call of several church leaders who directed our attention to the need to find God in the world and to proclaim God in and through the world of our work and the social and political order to our nation. In short, we let the news become *good news* once again. We heard the truth that the

reign of God is not just for the people who spend time in church. We heard the preaching of Jesus in our hearts, that in order to enter the reign of God we must serve. Individuals must serve. The church must serve. Hard news, but good news indeed.

Inside the walls of the church, we began to notice our own "success" with the adult catechumenate and we began to apply some of the principles of the RCIA to our own life as a church. We focused on promoting adult faith. We obviously did not give up on the kids, Elena, as you well know from your involvement in youth ministry. But the principles of the RCIA stayed with us and pervaded every facet of church life. We began with liturgy. It actually became the "source and summit of the Christian life," a phrase that you may have heard or studied in the documents of Vatican II. We invested time and attention in small faith sharing groups, noticing that smaller is actually better.

You may recall from your studies that there was a time when Catholic schools went through a profound transition, from leadership and sponsorship by religious congregations to lay leadership and sponsorship. That was part of those initial transition years after Vatican II. At first, that transition was awkward, as laypersons had looked to religious sisters and brothers and priests for their leadership in schools. But eventually the lay leaders became more confident about their *religious* competence as well as their *educational* competence. They moved from understanding the call of the baptized as nice theory. Faculty members began to take increased responsibility for creating evangelizing environments as well as first rate education.

Parents who sent children to Catholic schools understood that the reason for the schools' existence was the gospel. You see, for a time, Catholic schools struggled so much just to survive financially, that some of them became havens for parents who only wanted an alternative to public schools, but with not too much of the "religious agenda" of Catholic schools! Imagine!

These were the parents who habitually voiced complaints that their children were engaged in service to the poor, or learning the church's commitment to social justice. What some parents really were seeking was a good secular education in a safe environment. In recent years teachers in Catholic schools have been especially courageous and articulate about the *real* difference that Catholic schools can make to the world as well as the church. Parents themselves have been evangelized through their children's involvement in school. They became receptive to catechesis for their own faith development. That fact generated new demands for adult formation. It opened up new activities in parishes and retreat houses, universities and churches.

So, Elena, we have come a long way since the days of understanding evangelization as something we do (preaching the Word) for others who don't have the gift and won't get it without membership in our church! We have become more aware of the need to be an evangelizing church for each other as well as for newcomers. And, we have come to take our cue from the catechumenate, inviting people into a faith community that worships well in order to *live* the message that has been communicated and celebrated in a thousand subtle and overt ways. And we still have a long way to go.

In the words of Oscar Romero, a martyred bishop who died nearly forty years ago,

> *"Let's not forget, dear Christians, that the church was born of sinners. The church is holy, because it has God's Spirit giving it life; but it is sinful and it needs conversion, because we make it up – humans tending toward evil and at times perhaps with a past that gives us shame. But once we are converted, we try – we try! – to follow the Lord. We don't follow him as yet with perfection, but the effort to follow him is what makes a true disciple of our*

Lord Jesus Christ." (The Violence of Love: The Pastoral Wisdom of Archbishop Oscar Romero Compiled and translated by James R. Brockman (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988), p. 211.)

...Once we are converted, we *try*...

I have tried and I will keep on trying. And I greet you with a light heart and the pride of a mentor as you continue trying. We are a better church because you try.

God bless you and the work that you take up each day.

Claire

For Further Reading

The following sources may enrich the reading and discussion of the *GDC*.

For an overview of the church documents on catechetics and evangelization, see *The Catechetical Documents* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1996). This collection of documents includes the ones that are mentioned in the text, as well as others that would inform any conversation about the *GDC*. Each document contains a brief, critical introduction and an analysis of events leading to that document's composition, its reception and/or impact on the church.

An interesting sociological study of Catholics that will challenge and intrigue church leaders is contained in William V. D'Antonio, James D. Davidson, Dean R. Hoge and Ruth A. Wallace, *Laity American and Catholic: Transforming the Church* (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1996). The study offers insight into the attitudes and aspirations of Catholics from a variety of perspectives, ages, and ways of expressing faith.

An important source for mining the depths of evangelization and its meaning can be found in *Empowering Catechetical Leaders* (Edited by

Thomas H. Groome and Michael J. Corso. Washington, D.C.: National Catholic Education Association, 1999). Especially helpful for understanding evangelization are chapters one and two of that text, "The Purposes of Catechesis" by Thomas H. Groome and "Principles of Catechesis from Ecclesial Documents" Jane E. Regan.

For further discussion of the right and responsibility of the whole community in catechesis, see Maria Harris, *Fashion Me a People* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989). The role of adults as essential to catechesis is a theme in Harris' text, and it is the focus of "Adult Catechesis in the Christian Community" (republished in *The Catechetical Documents*, cited above). The reality of lay ministry and the relationship of lay ministry to evangelization are important and interesting features of contemporary Catholic life. A helpful source for reflection and discussion of these topics can be found in a collection of papers from a colloquium sponsored by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, entitled *Together in God's Service: Toward a Theology of Ecclesial Lay Ministry* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1998).

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